Statement of the Board of Directors of the American Association for the Advancement of Science Regarding Personal Attacks on Climate Scientists

Approved by the AAAS Board of Directors 28 June 2011

We are deeply concerned by the extent and nature of personal attacks on climate scientists. Reports of harassment, death threats, and legal challenges have created a hostile environment that inhibits the free exchange of scientific findings and ideas and makes it difficult for factual information and scientific analyses to reach policymakers and the public. This both impedes the progress of science and interferes with the application of science to the solution of global problems. AAAS vigorously opposes attacks on researchers that question their personal and professional integrity or threaten their safety based on displeasure with their scientific conclusions. The progress of science and protection of its integrity depend on both full transparency about the details of scientific methodology and the freedom to follow the pursuit of knowledge. The sharing of research data is vastly different from unreasonable, excessive Freedom of Information Act requests for personal information and voluminous data that are then used to harass and intimidate scientists. The latter serve only as a distraction and make no constructive contribution to the public discourse.

Scientists and policymakers may disagree over the scientific conclusions on climate change and other policy-relevant topics. But the scientific community has proven and well-established methods for resolving disagreements about research results. Science advances through a self-correcting system in which research results are shared and critically evaluated by peers and experiments are repeated when necessary. Disagreements about the interpretation of data, the methodology, and findings are part of daily scientific discourse. Scientists should not be subjected to fraud investigations or harassment simply for providing scientific results that are controversial. Most scientific disagreements are unrelated to any kind of fraud and are considered a legitimate and normal part of the scientific process. The scientific community takes seriously its responsibility for policing research misconduct, and extensive procedures exist to protect the rigor of the scientific method and to ensure the credibility of the research enterprise.

While we fully understand that policymakers must integrate the best available scientific data with other factors when developing policies, we think it would be unfortunate if policymakers became the arbiters of scientific information and circumvented the peer-review process. Moreover, we are concerned that establishing a practice of aggressive inquiry into the professional histories of scientists whose findings may bear on policy in ways that some find unpalatable could well have a chilling effect on the willingness of scientists to conduct research that intersects with policy-relevant scientific questions.

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